

## Backed by US, Turkish gov't expands war on Kurds

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

As Washington beefs up its military operations from the Incirlik Air Base in southern Turkey with airstrikes in Syria primarily aimed at Islamic State, the Turkish rulers have been stepping up their attacks on Kurdish fighters in Turkey and Iraq along with provocative actions targeting Kurdish-controlled areas on its border with Syria. Protests have condemned Ankara's assaults, and Washington and NATO's complicity, both in Turkey and beyond.

Thousands attended a demonstration in Istanbul Aug. 9 called by the Peace Bloc, a coalition of 80 organizations, reported *Hurriyet Daily News*. Authorities deployed water cannons and attempted to prevent participation by blocking roads leading to the action.

The previous day some 5,000 Kurds and supporters rallied in Cologne, Germany. Hundreds of others took to the streets in Paris; Brussels, Belgium; Manchester, England; and

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## Protests mark year since cop killed Michael Brown

Marchers in Ferguson say Black lives matter



Militant/John Hawkins  
March in Ferguson, Missouri, Aug. 9 marks one-year anniversary of killing of Michael Brown Jr. by cop Darren Wilson. In front at left is Brown's father, Michael Brown Sr.

BY JOHN HAWKINS

FERGUSON, Mo. — More than 1,000 demonstrators marched and rallied here Sunday, Aug. 9 to mark the first anniversary of the killing of

18-year-old Michael Brown Jr. by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson. The march, led by Brown's father, was part of a series of actions that drew participants from across the Midwest

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## Protests: 'Stop US-Turkish assault on Kurdish people!'



Militant/Jacquie Henderson  
During action called by Socialist Workers Party in Omaha, Nebraska, Aug. 6, protesters distribute fliers opposing attacks on Kurds. Dennis Richter, SWP state chairperson, discusses issue with Chad Cupit, who works nearby at University of Nebraska.

BY JACQUIE HENDERSON

OMAHA, Neb. — Protesters with signs in English and Spanish demanding "Stop U.S./Turkey assault on Kurds" rallied on a busy corner here Aug. 6. The action, called by the Socialist Workers Party, received honks of support from several passing cars, as well as a couple hostile remarks.

Dozens of people stopping at the corner in their cars took copies of a statement by Dennis Richter, chair-

person of the SWP in Nebraska. Chad Cupit, a research worker at nearby University of Nebraska, was one of the pedestrians who stopped to talk.

"The Kurds are an oppressed nationality of 30 million living in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria," Richter told him. "They have stepped forward to take on the Islamic State and to advance their struggle for a Kurdish homeland. But Washington and other

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## 'Socialist Workers Party only working-class voice'

BY MAGGIE TROWE

Osborne Hart and John Staggs, the Socialist Workers Party candidates for mayor and City Council in Philadelphia, are on the ballot, campaign director Chris Hoeppner announced Aug. 10.

"The SWP campaign is the only campaign in the U.S. that represents the interests of working people and presents a revolutionary perspective," Staggs told the *Militant*. "The response our municipal campaign has received shows the potential for the

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### Solidarity in Steel

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## Puerto Rico's unpayable debt is product of US colonial rule

BY SETH GALINSKY

Hoping to push bondholders to grant Puerto Rico more favorable terms to repay \$73 billion in loans, the government of the U.S. colony defaulted for the first time ever, paying just \$628,000 of a \$58 million payment due Aug. 3.

"It's obvious that this crisis is the result of colonialism," longtime Puer-

## 'Journey for Justice' defends right to vote

BY SUSAN LAMONT

ATLANTA — Fifty years after passage of the Voting Rights Act, a conquest of the mass struggle for Black rights of the 1950s and '60s, the fight against obstacles to exercising the right to vote remains an important question for the working class.

Thousands of people marched in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, July 13 in defense of voting rights at the opening of a federal trial challenging new restrictions in that state. The NAACP and other civil rights groups

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—On the picket line, p. 5—

Fired El Super grocery unionist in Los Angeles wins job back  
Australia dockworkers protest layoffs, union busting

# Actions defend right to vote

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kicked off a "Journey for Justice" in Selma, Alabama, Aug. 1. The six-week, 860-mile relay march will culminate in a rally in Washington, D.C., in mid-September. And on Aug. 5 a federal appeals court panel ruled that the voter identification law in Texas, one of the strictest in the country, discriminates against Blacks and Latinos in violation of the Voting Rights Act.

The fight to push back the capitalist rulers' attacks on voting rights is part of the new rise in the struggle for Black rights, which is winning support from broad layers of the working class. The scope of protests against police brutality, the growing demands for \$15 an hour and a union and widespread opposition to continued use of Confederate symbols in public places grow out of earlier gains won by the civil rights struggles in overcoming divisions forced on workers by the defeat of Radical Reconstruction after the Civil War and the decades of segregation that followed.

## 1965 Voting Rights Act

The North Carolina lawsuit challenges a bill enacted by North Carolina's state legislature in 2013, shortly after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a key section of the Voting Rights Act.

Congress first passed the Voting Rights Act in 1965 under the impact of the massive working-class civil rights battles that forced an end to racist Jim Crow segregation in the South. The act struck down literacy tests, poll taxes and other "requirements" used throughout the South to prevent Blacks from voting or running for office.

The section of the Voting Rights Act voided by the Supreme Court had es-

tablished a "preclearance" list, which required some state and local governments to get federal approval before making any changes in their voting laws. The states, counties and cities on the list were those with a proven history of voter disenfranchisement of Blacks and Latinos. It included nine states — Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia — as well as scores of local governments from sections of New York City to Monterey County, California.

The North Carolina legislature wasted no time in passing more restrictive election regulations. The new law reduced the number of days of early voting, disallowed people from registering and voting on the same day, ended counting votes that were cast in the wrong precinct, eliminated the practice of pre-registering teenagers before they turned 18 and increased the number of poll observers who can challenge a voter's eligibility.

One of the most onerous measures in the new law required people to present a photo ID before being allowed to vote. One state study estimated that at least 318,000 registered North Carolina voters, many of whom are African-American, elderly or low income, did not have driver's licenses or state-issued ID cards at that time. Faced with mounting protests against the photo ID requirement, the North Carolina legislature eased that aspect of the new voting law this past June, so it is no longer part of the legal challenge.

The trial, which is being heard by U.S. District Judge Thomas Schroeder in Winston-Salem, wrapped up July 31. The judge said his decision

## Unionists in NY protest Verizon concession demands



Militant/Maggie Trowe

NEW YORK — "Negotiate, don't dictate!" and "Union strong!" chanted Communications Workers of America members at an informational picket line against concessions in front of the Verizon building in Midtown Manhattan Aug. 13. It was part of a day of action up and down the East Coast. The contract between the communications giant and 39,000 members of the CWA and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in nine states and the District of Columbia expired Aug. 1. Verizon wants increased health care contributions and concessions on pensions and is training thousands of nonunion workers to use in the event of a strike.

— MAGGIE TROWE

will not be immediate.

Lawsuits challenging voter ID laws and other efforts to roll back voting rights have also been filed in Wisconsin, Ohio, Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Kansas, Louisiana and Texas.

Last October the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Texas officials could implement the state's new restrictions for the election that year, effectively disenfranchising more than half a million people. The appeals court panel Aug. 5 declared this had a "discriminatory effect" in violation of the Voting Rights Act, but allowed Texas officials to continue enforcing the law pending further review by a district court.

## Journey for Justice

### Georgia, Aug. 7-19

State rally Atlanta Aug. 14

### S. Carolina, Aug. 20-25

State rally Greenville Aug. 20

### N. Carolina, Aug. 26-Sept. 2

State rally Charlotte Aug. 28

### Virginia/D.C., Sept. 3-16

Youth rally Richmond Sept. 10  
Advocacy Day D.C. Sept. 16

For more information:  
[action.naacp.org](http://action.naacp.org)

# THE MILITANT

## Workers fight against concession demands



Militant/Arlene Rubinstein  
Steelworkers rally in Pittsburgh July 30 against ATI. Contract expired June 30.

**The 'Militant' backs Steelworkers at Allegheny Technologies, U.S. Steel and ArcelorMittal and union electricians and Communications Workers at Verizon fighting against steep concession demands from the bosses.**

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Signed articles by contributors do not necessarily represent the *Militant's* views. These are expressed in editorials.

# 'Halt assault on Kurds!'

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imperialist powers, fearing the dynamic toward Kurdish sovereignty, have relentlessly opposed Kurdish independence and want to reimpose a centralized Iraqi government with powers over the Kurds' autonomous region."

Cupit didn't know a lot about the recent events, but said that he opposed the assault on the Kurds. He was one of several people who got a copy of the *Militant* to find out more.

❖

BY DAG TIRSÉN

MANCHESTER, England — "We will keep fighting and get our nation," Burhan Faisal from the group Mali Kurd (Kurdish Home) told around 150 participants in an Aug. 8 action here condemning the Turkish attacks against Kurds in Turkey, Iraq and Syria. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan lost support to the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party in the last election, Faisal said. "That's why he's making the Kurds out to be terrorists again."

The protest was organized by the Kurdish Cultural Centre and most participants were Kurds. Many indicated support for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has been the main target of the Turkish attacks.

Nishtman Osman spoke proudly about the women who "carry the same weight as the men," fighting with the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria against Islamic State.

Jack Fallon, a journalist who was in Kobani, Syria, in June told participants that by the time Islamic State was driven out, the city was almost destroyed. Rebuilding it involves not just Kurds, but many others from across Syria and Turkey.

"We must also protest the U.S. and U.K. governments' role," Pete Clifford from the Communist League said. "They are complicit with Erdogan's attacks. The U.K. rulers were responsible after World War I for denying the Kurds a homeland. Today they are driven by the same concerns: stability for their class interests."

❖

BY JANICE LYNN

ATLANTA — Alan Baran, president of the Kurdish Cultural Center in Tucker, Georgia, spoke at an Aug. 7 Militant Labor Forum here entitled "Turkish government opens base to US, attacks Kurdish fighters."

"Kurdistan was divided into four pieces," Baran said. "We have been fighting this injustice for the last 100 years. But even though there has been a lot of suffering we have had success because we never gave up." He denounced the two weeks of intense bombing by the Turkish government against Kurdish fighters.

Also speaking was freelance photojournalist Elizabeth Chappell, who recently returned from Kobani. She has been visiting Turkey for 17 years and has been won to support the Kurdish struggle for independence, seeing firsthand the discrimination the Kurds faced from the Turkish government. "The Kurds are a very strong and proud people," she said. "They need to become independent."

"The Socialist Workers Party supports the Kurdish fight for a home-

land," Sam Manuel said. "We demand an end to the attacks on the Kurdish people and pledge to bring their struggle to working people in this city and throughout Georgia."

In closing remarks, Baran said that before the recent advances, "90 percent of people in the world didn't know we exist and now 90 percent know who we are and we have won their respect. We want to continue to get the word out."

❖

BY MARY MARTIN

SEATTLE — Thirteen people held a picket at the Jackson Federal Building here Aug. 10 at rush hour to protest the U.S.-backed Turkish government assaults on the Kurdish people. The action was initiated by the Socialist Workers Party. John Naubert, SWP candidate for Seattle Port Commissioner, position 2, read a statement explaining who the Kurdish people are and why Washington and Ankara are



Militant/Hugo Wils

Rally in Manchester, England, Aug. 8 opposing Turkish rulers' attacks on Kurdish people. "U.K. rulers were responsible after World War I for denying Kurds a homeland," said Pete Clifford of Communist League, speaking, "and today they are driven by their same class interests."

assaulting them. He called on all working people to demand the attacks stop and urged passersby to join the protest.

A handful of people stopped to talk and pick up fliers. A worker on his

break from a nearby office explained that he is from Iran and has many friends who are Kurdish. He took a photo of the protest to send to his friends.

## U.S.-backed Turkish govt steps up war on Kurds

Continued from front page

protest actions in several U.S. cities.

Ankara's airstrikes against the Turkish Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) camps in northern Iraq have killed hundreds and spread fires through the mountainous areas, forcing residents to flee. Civilian villages have also been hit, including Zargali, where 10 people were killed Aug. 1.

The Turkish government says the PKK has retaliated by killing at least 20 members of the Turkish security forces.

Despite calls by Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan, that the PKK pull back from the Kurdish region there, PKK fighters vowed that they would stay. "As PKK and as Kurds, we are not only fighting for Kurdistan, we are fighting for the world," PKK Commander Chem Peri told Rudaw News.

Last December the PKK along with the Kurdish People's Protection Units in Syria (YPG) fought to reach Mount Sinjar in northwestern Iraq where thousands of members of the Yazidi religious group had fled from Islamic State attacks. The Kurdish fighters succeeded in leading them to safety.

"Fighting against ISIS [Islamic State] makes us feel good like we are doing something good for humanity," 25-year-old female commander Dilan Serdar told Rudaw News.

### Police raids target Kurds

In Turkey police raids have led to the arrests of some 1,700 people, the

vast majority of them accused of being members of the PKK and other fighters for Kurdish rights. While the cops have detained a small number of Islamic State suspects, many "have been quietly released," reported the *New York Times*.

In the Kurdish region in southeastern Turkey, special operation police teams raided a construction site in Yuksekova Aug. 5, taking into custody dozens of Kurdish workers. A video being circulated on social media shows the detainees being forced to lie face down on the ground with their hands tied behind their back as the cops yell at them, "You will face the power of the Turk!"

In battles with police in the nearby town of Silopi Aug. 7, four Kurdish protesters were killed, as demonstrators sought to prevent the cops from entering their neighborhoods. "Police forces also set six houses on fire and opened fire on the ambulances that were carrying the wounded civilians to the hospital," reported Kurdishnews website.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's perspective is to move toward early elections later this year to reverse a blow his Justice and Development Party (AKP) suffered in elections in June. Winning 13 percent of the vote, the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) entered parliament for the first time and blocked the AKP from keeping the majority it had held for 12 years. The vote set back Erdogan's plans to expand the executive powers of the presidency. The deadline for

forming a governing coalition is Aug. 23, though little progress seems to have been made as the Turkish government focuses on attacking the Kurds.

"We will make them sorry for wanting to go to early polls," HDP Co-chair Selahattin Demirtas told the crowd at the Aug. 9 Istanbul rally, expressing his view that gains won by the Kurds will not be reversed.

### U.S. steps up airstrikes in Syria

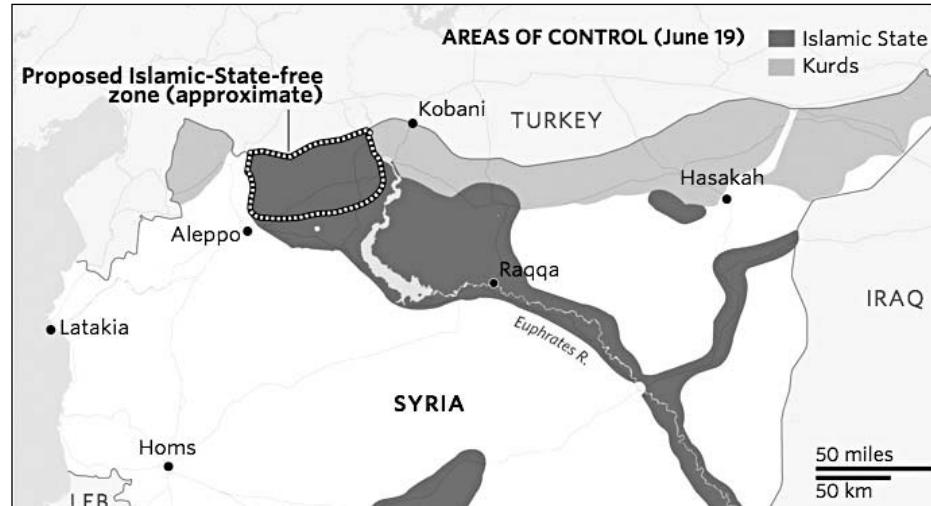
Washington began launching airstrikes from the Incirlik Air Base Aug. 5 and has deployed six F-16 fighters along with 300 military personnel to the base. This is in addition to the 1,700 U.S. forces that had already been stationed there, according to Defense Department data.

The base is now central to U.S. airstrikes in Syria, mainly against Islamic State, but also to provide air cover to the several dozen U.S.-trained forces on the ground in Syria when they get into confrontations with al-Qaeda's Nusra Front or Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's forces. In one of their first actions the "trainees" suffered a blow, with five of them kidnapped by Nusra Front Aug. 4.

The deal drawn up by Washington and Ankara allowing U.S. forces to operate out of the Incirlik Air Base is also aimed at obstructing YPG fighters in Syria from making further advances against Islamic State near Turkey's border and from strengthening the Kurd's fight toward an independent state. The deal involves creating a buffer zone 55 miles wide and 25 miles deep in northern Syria where Islamic State combatants will be driven out but Kurdish forces will not be allowed in.

In recent months, the YPG has forced Islamic State fighters out of 2,000 square miles of territory in northern Syria.

Erdogan had declared that he would prevent the establishment of a Kurdish state in this area "no matter what it costs." As part of his regime's provocative actions aimed at the Kurds in Syria, the Turkish military has placed dozens of tanks and armored vehicles on the border by Syria's Kurdish-controlled Hasakah province.



# Family demands truth in cop killing of Zachary Hammond

BY JOHN STUDER

The killing of unarmed Zachary Hammond, a 19-year-old Caucasian who was sitting in his car with a young woman, by cop Mark Tiller in Seneca, South Carolina, July 26 has begun to garner increasing attention from opponents of police brutality and others.

Fifty people, including Hammond's family, held a vigil to honor his life Aug. 7 in the Hardee's restaurant parking lot where he was killed. A Rally for Justice for Hammond is scheduled for Aug. 15, called by an African-American opponent of gun violence and backed by the family.

Initially refusing to identify the officer, Seneca Police Chief John Covington said that the shooting was self-defense because Hammond drove his vehicle directly "towards the officer" in an effort to run him down.

However, a private autopsy showed that Hammond was shot twice from behind through the open driver's window.

"Clearly this officer was not in any danger at the time he fired the two shots into the car," Eric Bland, attorney for Hammond's family, told Reuters Aug. 11.

Covington claimed Tiller was part of a sting to arrest Hammond's date for selling drugs. But she was arrested solely for misdemeanor possession of

marijuana and released.

The killing of Hammond has drawn comparison with recent indictments of cops who shot Black men in traffic stops, including Michael Slager's killing of Walter Scott in North Charleston, South Carolina, and Ray Tensing's killing of Samuel DuBose in Cincinnati.

Bland noted that the majority of people killed by cops in the U.S. are Caucasian. "The media and our government officials have treated the death of an unarmed white teenager differently than they would have if this were a death of an unarmed Black teen," he told the *Washington Post*.

About half of the 585 people killed by cops so far this year were Caucasian, the *Post* reported. Twenty-five percent were Black, although African-Americans make up only 13 percent of the population.

Federal officials announced Aug. 12 they will conduct a civil rights investigation of the shooting. Hammond's family is also calling for the state to release footage from the cop's dashboard camera.

Some activists in the Black Lives Matter movement have written about Hammond's killing on social media, including DeRay McKesson, who was arrested protesting in St. Louis on the one-year anniversary of the cop killing of Michael Brown in the overwhelmingly Black suburb of Ferguson.

## Refugees in France say, 'Open the borders'



Militant/Claude Bleton

CALAIS, France — Chanting, "Open the borders, we want freedom!" some 300 immigrants and their supporters marched here Aug. 8.

The protest set out from "The Jungle," a makeshift camp of tents and shacks on the outskirts of the city, and finished up on the Calais pier. Some 4,000 immigrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan, fleeing conditions of war and social crisis, have been staying in the camp for months.

The demonstration was the initiative of French immigrant rights organizations, including Emmaus, Article 13 and Migrants' Inn. Supporters came from the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and the U.K. Protesters carried handmade placards with the names of the 12 people who have died attempting to cross the English Channel from Calais to the U.K. since June. Other placards read "No more deaths" and "Migrants = humans." Banner above reads, "Bring down the walls."

The protesters were also responding to the cops using pepper spray against immigrants and the building of a new mile-long fence to stop immigrants getting to the U.K. via the Channel Tunnel.

— DEBRA JACOBS

## —MILITANT LABOR FORUMS—

### CALIFORNIA

#### Oakland

**Stop Murderous Assault on Kurds! Protest Washington's Support for Turkish Government Bombings!** Speakers: Raman Osman, Kurdish musician; Ali Naimi, Baran Cultural Group; Armineh Megroian, Light Brigade; Andrea Morell, Socialist Workers Party. Sat., Aug. 22. Reception, 6:30 p.m.; program, 7:30 p.m. 675 Hegenberger Road, Suite 250. Tel.: (510) 686-1351.

### FLORIDA

#### Miami

**Why the Vatican's Shift in Direction Creates Openings for Revolutionaries Today.** Speaker: Anthony Dutrow, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Aug. 21. Dinner, 6:30 p.m.; program, 7:30 p.m. Donation: Dinner \$5; program \$5. 7911 Biscayne Blvd., Suite 2. Tel.: (305) 757-8869.

### NEBRASKA

#### Omaha

**Defend Engineer Tom Harding! Fight for Rail Safety!** Fri., Aug. 21, 7:30 p.m. 3302 Q St., 2nd Floor. Tel.: (402) 779-7697.

### WASHINGTON, D.C.

**Cuba and Chernobyl: A Video of the Internationalist Medical Program Aiding Victims of the Chernobyl Disaster.** Fri., Aug. 21, 7 p.m. 143 Kennedy St. NW, Suite 15. Tel.: (202) 536-5080.

### CANADA

#### Calgary

**Celebrate Cuba's Victory Against Washington: Support the Fight Against U.S. Economic Blockade.** Speaker: Francois Bradette, Communist League. Fri., Aug. 21, 7:30 p.m. 4909 17th Ave. SE. Tel.: (403) 457-9044.

#### Montreal

**No to Harper's Travel Ban, Open Canada's Borders, Repeal Law C51: How Canada's 'Anti-Terror' Laws Target Workers' Rights.** Speaker: Michel Prairie, Communist League. Donation \$5. Fri., Aug. 21, 7:30 p.m. 7107 St. Denis, Room 204. Tel.: (514) 272-5840.

## Protests mark year since death of Michael Brown

### Continued from front page

and as far away as South Carolina, New York and California. It involved relatives of several victims of police killings who have helped set the tone for a growing nationwide movement to bring killer cops to justice.

That night, following a full day of activities, there was a confrontation between police and protesters. Heavily armed cops became increasingly provocative as the evening wore on. After hundreds of demonstrators had moved out of West Florissant Avenue in response to police orders, cop cars sped down the street and dozens of officers in riot gear formed a skirmish line.

Unrelated gunfire broke out nearby, and police shot and critically wounded 18-year-old Tyrone Harris Jr. Police released a video Aug. 11 they say shows Harris pulling a pistol from his waistband after gunshots were heard nearby.

The next day St. Louis County Executive Steve Stenger declared a state of emergency, transferring police powers related to protests to St. Louis County police. Dozens of protesters were arrested during actions Aug. 10 that included sit-ins outside the U.S. Courthouse in St. Louis and blocking evening rush hour traffic on Interstate 70.

On Aug. 11 a group of Caucasian men identifying themselves as members of Oath Keepers, armed with pistols, rifles and body armor, showed up on West Florissant Avenue.

### Relatives speak on cop brutality

Marchers assembled Aug. 9 at the memorial to Michael Brown on Canfield Road here. At a rally before the demonstration more than a dozen people spoke, including Michael Brown Sr., father of the youth whose death spurred

protests across the country; Erica Garner, daughter of Eric Garner, killed by police in Staten Island, New York, July 17 last year; and Bree Newsome, who climbed the flag pole in Columbia, South Carolina, and took down the Confederate battle flag days before the state legislature voted to discontinue flying it.

"I first met Mike Brown Sr. last Aug. 11, just two days after his son was killed," Cephus Johnson, uncle of Oscar Grant, who was killed by Bay Area Rapid Transit cop Johannes Mehserle in 2009, told the crowd. "Since then he has been traveling all around awakening people to action, so that what happened to Mike Brown Jr. should not happen to another human being."

"The Bay Area Black community stood with us," he said. "But more importantly they used their First Amendment rights to speak out against the injustice and get Mehserle indicted. That's what communities across the country have to do for all families who lose a loved one to police violence."

At exactly 11:55 a.m., the time of Brown's shooting, the rally observed four and a half minutes of silence — one minute for every hour Brown's body lay in the street after he was killed.

"We came to fight for social justice and show that the labor movement is involved and is part of the Black Lives Matter fight," said Marcia Gant, a member of Communications Workers of America Local 6355 and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists in St. Louis, who came to the march with a delegation from her local. "Michael Brown's mother is a grocery store worker and is a member of the UFCW."

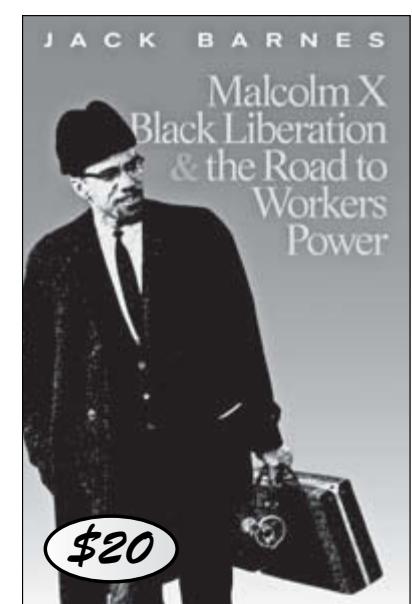
Mark Frank, an education counselor from nearby University City who is Caucasian, told the *Militant*, "We need

to support the Black community in the fight against police brutality. We need to show up and show our outrage. The same kind of stuff happens to whites, but not in the same proportion. It's wrong and it's got to stop."

"The only time they listen is when they see they have something to lose," Michael Person, a longtime Ferguson resident and member of the CBTU and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1439, told the *Militant*. "I had not been involved for 10 years. But I couldn't just sit back and live well myself and watch all this go on around me."

"We marshall the demonstrations to keep protesters safe from attacks by cops," said Markese Mull, a leader of Peacekeepers of St. Louis and a long-time friend of the Brown family. "As long as our kids are shot and left laying on the ground, we are going to keep marching until something is done."

Alyson Kennedy contributed to this article.



[www.pathfinderpress.com](http://www.pathfinderpress.com)

# —ON THE PICKET LINE—

MAGGIE TROWE, EDITOR

## Help the *Militant* cover steel, auto and Verizon contract fights!

This column is dedicated to spreading the truth about labor resistance unfolding today, to give voice to those engaged in battle and help build solidarity. National steel and auto contracts are approaching expiration and the East Coast Verizon agreement has expired. I invite workers involved in fights against concessions to contact me at 306 W. 37th St., 13th Floor, New York, NY 10018; or (212) 244-4899; or themilitant@mac.com. We'll work together to ensure your story is told.

—Maggie Trowe

## Ft. Lauderdale airport workers demand pay increase

FT. LAUDERDALE, Fla. — G2 Secure Staff workers — wheelchair attendants, carousel baggage handlers and sky caps — held a rally for higher pay at the airport here July 29 organized by Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ.

The protesters are some of the 1,200 contracted airport workers now exempted from the Broward County Living Wage Ordinance. They earn an average of \$8.14 an hour. They are demanding the county minimum wage — \$11.68 for those who receive benefits and \$13.20 for those who don't — be extended to them.

"This fight has been going on for two and half years," Gueldere Guerilus told the *Militant* at the Southwest Terminal a few days after the rally. He is a leader of the fight for a union and a pay raise who has worked for G2 for more than eight years. "Our fight is not only for us, but for everyone. Twenty years ago you could make three times as much doing these same jobs."

Guerilus said they've worked together with workers at other airports to organize a union and \$15 an hour and were encouraged by a recent victory in Philadelphia where airport workers won a \$12 an hour minimum wage.

G2 is a subcontractor for Southwest Airlines and Virgin Airlines, both of which refuse to recognize the union, he said. Southwest ramp workers and ticket agents have a union.

In 2014 Southwest topped \$1 billion in profits. Virgin also reported increases.

The Ft. Lauderdale Unitarian Uni-

versalist Church and the Disability Caucus of Miami have helped organize support for the workers.

—Anthony Dutrow

## Fired El Super grocery unionist in Los Angeles wins job back

LOS ANGELES — Close to 200 jubilant union members and supporters escorted Fermín Rodríguez back to work at El Super grocery store #13 in south Los Angeles Aug. 9. Rodríguez, a cashier and member of United Food and Commercial Workers, has been involved in the two-year fight for a union and a contract. He was fired Jan. 8.

Last December workers voted 402-131 to recertify the union after the company pushed through a decertification vote. The workers then launched a boycott of El Super that has been endorsed by 110 community organizations, 18 neighborhood councils and the California Labor Federation.

As part of actions at more than a dozen El Super stores and the company's headquarters June 17, more than 1,000 El Super workers and supporters turned in 25,000 signatures demanding Rodríguez be reinstated. A week earlier the state Division of Labor Enforcement Standards ordered El Super to pay more than \$180,000 in penalties for imposing unpaid off-the-clock work.

On July 30, Chief U.S. District Court Judge George King, responding to a union lawsuit charging the grocery company with unfair labor practices, issued an injunction ordering El Super to immediately reinstate Rodríguez, who the judge said had been unlawfully terminated for his union activity, and to restore the vacation time accrual policy that the company had changed in an attempt to deny workers

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Militant/Bill Arth

Fermín Rodríguez, center, cashier at El Super grocery chain in Los Angeles who is active in United Food and Commercial Workers campaign for union representation and contract, returns to work Aug. 9, at head of march of 200, after union fought and won his job back.

earned vacation.

El Super has 46 stores in southern California, Arizona and Nevada. The 600 UFCW members at the seven stores that are unionized are demanding a contract that includes a 40-hour workweek, sick pay, wage increases and seniority rights. El Super has agreed to resume contract negotiations Aug. 18.

"We want to thank everyone from the community for supporting us," Rodríguez said at the rally. "I have always fought for my rights with the union. There were eight other workers fired. We are fighting for them to be returned to their jobs."

— Bill Arth and Deborah Liatos

## Australia dockworkers protest layoffs, union busting

SYDNEY — Workers at Hutchison Ports Australia, members of the Maritime Union of Australia, walked off the job here for four hours Aug. 3 to protest the company's refusal to negotiate with the union over layoffs. Chanting, "Stand up! Fight back!" they marched to the Hutchison terminal, where they were joined by other members of the MUA and supporters from a number of other unions at a rally of some 200.

The company — a subsidiary of the Hong Kong-based Hutchison Port Holdings, which operates in 52 ports

in 26 countries — sacked close to 100 workers at its port operations in Sydney and Brisbane by midnight text message and emails Aug. 6.

The company has subcontracted out ships to two other Sydney terminals — Patrick and DP World. The union calls this "textbook union-busting tactics in offloading shipping contracts in order to increase casualization and undermine current conditions."

"We want to negotiate a redundancy [layoff] process that is fair," Warren Smith, MUA assistant national secretary, told the rally. The union wants the right of return to work for laid-off workers.

"No one wants to lose their job," Ray Byrne, one of the Hutchison workers, who had previously worked at Patrick, told the *Militant*. The company has been operating for only two years, and there is no clear seniority, he said. "They want to get rid of anyone outspoken."

Following the rally the workers marched right up to the Hutchison terminal building. Messages of solidarity were read from the Union of Hong Kong Dockers, who successfully fought a 40-day strike battle against Hutchison Port Holdings in 2013, and the U.S. International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

— Linda Harris

## — CALENDAR —

### ILLINOIS

#### Chicago

**The Kurds in Turkey and Kurdish Identity.** A discussion with Mucahit Bilici, assistant professor of sociology at John Jay College, City University of New York. Sun., Aug. 23, 5 p.m. 4803 N. Milwaukee Ave. Unit A. Sponsor: Chicago Kurdish Cultural Center.

### NEW YORK

#### New York

**Absolved by Solidarity.** Prison paintings by Antonio Guerrero, one of Cuban Five on exhibit through Sept. 11. Meeting on Sat., Aug. 22. Speakers include: representative, Cuban Mission to U.N.; Jim Furlong, Hudson Guild Director of Arts. Reception, 6 p.m.; program, 7 p.m. Guild Gallery II, Hudson Guild Fulton Center, 119 9th Ave., by 18th Street. For more information: (212) 760-9837.

### SOUTH CAROLINA

#### Charleston

**Days of Grace.** In honor of Walter Scott, Clementa Pinckney and other victims of racism and police violence. March and rally. Sat., Sept. 5, 9 a.m., Wragg Square, 342 Meeting St. Strategy Conference, Sept. 5, 2-6 p.m.; Sept. 6, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., International Longshoremen's Association Local 1422 Hall, 1142 Morrison Dr. Sponsors: ILA Local 1422, Black Lives Matter Charleston.

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# Cuban Five: ‘Prison in the United States’

## Gerardo Hernández explains why Cubans today celebrate their independence

The following interview with Gerardo Hernández appeared in the online publication *Cubadebate* on July 26, the 62nd anniversary of the opening battle of the revolutionary struggle in Cuba that led to the Jan. 1, 1959, triumph over the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista.

Hernández is one of the Cuban Five — revolutionaries who were arrested in 1998 and imprisoned in the United States for their activity keeping tabs on paramilitary groups in Florida that carried out violent attacks on the Cuban Revolution and its supporters. Last December the 16-year-long international campaign to free the Five succeeded — a victory for the Cuban Revolution. Hernández, Ramón Labañino, and Antonio Guerrero were released from federal prison and returned to Cuba; René González and Fernando González had been released previously after serving their entire sentences. Translation and subheadings are by the *Militant*.

❖

**BY YOSBEL BULLAÍN VILTRÉS AND YULIAT DANAY ACOSTA**

*Peace is vitally important to Gerardo Hernández. Only those who've been deprived of natural light and contact with their loved ones as a result of risking his life to defend the lives of others can appreciate the value of a safe, peaceful environment.*

*This Sunday, Gerardo will have a second chance to experience something as though for the very first time. After more than 16 years in prison, he will once again be able to celebrate July 26 with his loved ones. But his memories remain intact, like a photo album in chronological order. It's impossible to erase what you have lived.*

*On behalf of the Five, Gerardo spoke to *Cubadebate* about why he defends his ideas and how, in personally symbolic ways, they celebrated from afar the Cuban Revolution's historic dates. He also spoke about how, even in prison, those who live in the United States cannot escape the manipulation in the press that Cuba is subjected to on such occasions.*

In addition to the regular punishment that imprisonment implies, we faced a few additional abuses. One of them was that if we felt like watching television, we had to suffer through the same propaganda that everyone in the United States undergoes. For example, on May 20, [the Spanish-language network] Univision made a point of broadcasting its congratulations to Cuba on its Independence Day!<sup>1</sup> And sometimes prisoners would hear that and turn around and say to me, “Hey Cuba, congratulations!”

<sup>1</sup> Opponents of the 1959 revolution celebrate May 20, 1902, as Cuba's independence day. That was when the first elected president took office after Cuba won independence from Spain. By then Washington had forced the new government to give up Cuban soil at Guantánamo Bay for a U.S. naval base, and to cede to U.S. imperialism the right to intervene militarily and plunder the island's workers and natural wealth.

And I'd say to them, “Don't congratulate me today; I'm not celebrating yet!”

“But why?”

And then I'd have to explain: “Jan. 1 is when you should congratulate me!”

These were great opportunities for a history lesson, because they were congratulating me in good faith. It happened constantly: “Congratulations Cuba! Congratulations!”

On July 26, of course, the vast majority of the television channels never so much as mentioned the date, although at times on some of the English-language channels something appeared, especially if there was a very large rally in Cuba. They would refer to the date and explain

a little, in very broad strokes. And I always put on my little Cuban flag, which I still have, because I was able to bring it back. In fact, quite often I wore it anyway, even if there was no historic date to celebrate. But I always wore it for our important national dates and celebrations.

Whenever I wore it, people would notice and say to me, “Hey Cuba, you're all dressed up today!”

“No,” I'd explain, “it's because today's an important day.” And so that was how it was on Jan. 1, on Fidel's birthday, on July 26 — our historic dates. This was our way of commemorating them, because there was no other way to do it.

These incidents gave us the opportunity to educate many people about these questions. Because when they saw “Congratulations to Cuba on its Independence Day,” everyone thought that for Cuba this meant May 20. They didn't know the political background behind this disinformation.

This happened for a long time on July 26. But after a while, as the years passed, people who'd spent a long time with you already understood. And, it goes without saying, the same thing happened with the case of the Five. We always used our case as an example when we spoke with the other prisoners.

### Lies about Cuba

The media also painted prerevolutionary Cuba as an earthly paradise. In response, I'd tell this story. When I was still free, I listened to Miami radio stations in order to keep tabs on *Radio Martí*. One day, a woman called in to one of these talk shows and said:

“Oh Martha, those communists with their claims! It's all a lie, Martha! Because I remember, Martha, we had a yacht and we lived in Miramar and we used to go down and get on the yacht and go out sailing on those lovely Cuban afternoons. And all that about people being taken prisoner and being tortured, all lies, Martha! If you knew someone in the government, they'd get you out, Martha.”

And I'd say to myself, “What this woman is saying is incredible!”



Later, when the prisoners felt comfortable with you, they'd ask, “Was that how it was? People were just sent to the firing squad?”

I had to explain the kinds of things that were found in the police stations, how they were filled with every kind of torture instrument imaginable, even things for removing eyeballs.

Nobody could conceive of such things, much less Cubans! For a young man, it's not easy to comprehend. You need time to let it sink in. Those issues of *Bohemia* magazine with pictures of young people who'd been murdered — tortured and thrown into a pond with a nipple missing from their chest — and the dictatorship said *they* were the terrorists. That really got to me!

When you get to the U.S., where they show photos of those who were shot by firing squads and talk about those executed by Castro, by Che, they always show a famous picture of Blanco Rico, who was, I believe, chief of police. When he was shot — I remember he was wearing a white suit — *Bohemia* said that his last words had been, “Okay, you boys got this far. Keep going with the revolution!” And the guy was a ruthless murderer!

So they show the photo of his execution, when he falls into a pit. They show photos of men executed by “Castro's firing squads,” but they never tell you who that man really was. When they'd show a documentary like that, I'd tell the young prisoners: “Yes, but what they don't say is who that man really was.” And I'd tell them about all the torture devices that were found in the police stations.<sup>2</sup>

### Batista's record of torture

Afterwards, when we received the book from Cuba containing works by various artists — *Desde la soledad y la esperanza* [Between Solitude and Hope] — there was a section that included those photos from *Bohemia* showing those instruments for removing fingernails or eyes. “Look here,” I'd say, “this is the Cuba that they want you to think was a paradise!”

I think this is something we have to stress, because today, when I speak with

my nephews for example, they don't know about these photos. We have to continue to stress this, so that people know what really happened here. The cars, architecture, and music of the 1950s are in fashion today but nobody is talking about the other thing that happened here in the fifties. We have to continue to remind young people of that. If we don't, if we let those who want to portray those years as Cuba's golden age win the battle, we'll be in much worse shape.

For example, in the place where I went to high school, former Police Station no. 14, I'm sure that many of the students in that school today have no clear idea of what happened there before, of how many young people were tortured in the basement where they now take shop classes. We've got to constantly stress that, otherwise it's just another school, just another building. But every place has its history.

How many times do we pass by a plaque without anyone paying it the least attention. On that very street corner, a student might have been shot and killed, yet people pass by as though nothing had ever happened. That's because we were born into a peaceful country; a country where such crimes don't happen. And we take for granted that it was like this in the past, too.

### Capitalist world of gangs, cops

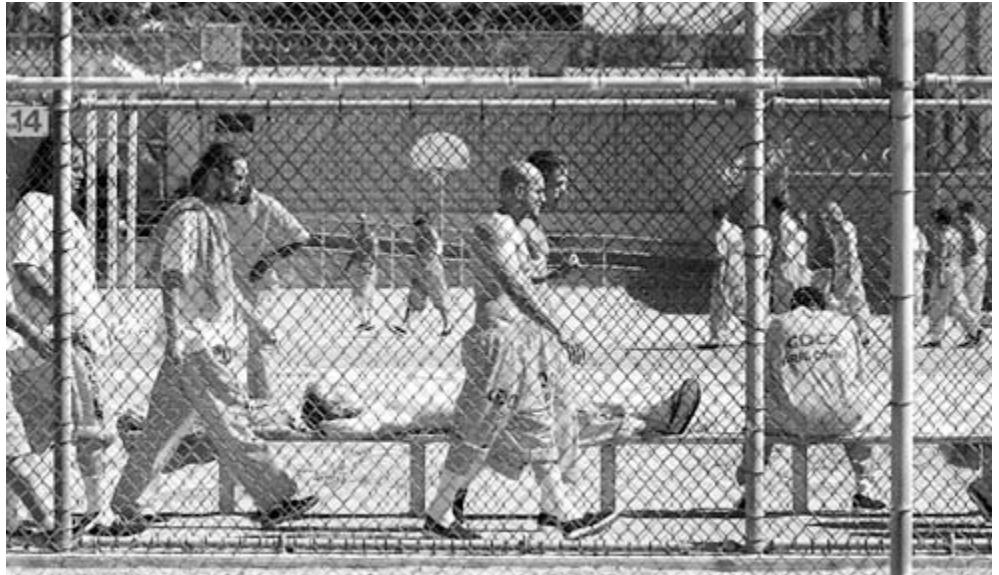
The five of us spent 16 years in the company of young people from Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, the United States, listening to their sto-

<sup>2</sup> Hernández was likely recalling not Antonio Blanco Rico, Batista's head of military intelligence (killed in 1956 by Revolutionary Directorate fighters), but Col. Cornelio Rojas, chief of police in Santa Clara. Rojas was one of hundreds of torturers and murderers tried by revolutionary tribunals in 1959. “This may have been the only revolution in which the main war criminals were tried and brought to justice,” Fidel Castro told a journalist in 2006. “There were no lynchings, no bloodbaths ... because of our insistence and our promise: ‘War criminals will be brought to justice and punished.’”

# ates was a tremendous school for us' socialist revolution — 'a history lesson' for workers in US, too



Above: National Institute of Agrarian Reform of Cuba  
After revolution in 1959, many police stations that previously housed torture chambers were turned into schools, including "the place where I went to high school, former Police Station no. 14," said Gerardo Hernández. Above, Raúl Castro, center, at Jan. 28, 1960, ceremony when Moncada army barracks in Santiago was transformed into July 26 School. Left, thousands celebrate in Santiago this year on anniversary of July 26, 1953, attack on Moncada garrison there that opened Cuban Revolution.



Reuters/Lucy Nicholson

Exercise yard at state prison in Chino, California, June 3, 2011. Prison is a reflection and microcosm of capitalist society itself, Hernández said. Imprisoned in the United States for some 16 years, the Cuban Five got to know problems "that are common to many countries."

ries. The last cellmate I had was a young man, 24 years old, who was serving a double life sentence.

"Cuba," he told me, "what happened is that I grew up in this environment. My dad had to join the gangs in order to support my family. I grew up seeing that. One day some pickup trucks arrived at my house. They were looking for my dad but he found a place to hide. They took my uncle, and by the next morning he'd been killed.

"That divided my family forever. My grandmother never forgave my father. She said it was his fault my uncle had been killed.

"But that's how it is," he told me. "In that city, when you go out with your girlfriend, you have to be very careful. If you pass the wrong place and someone says to you, 'I like that girl,' she will be snatched from your hands. You'll never see her again."

I remember the first time he told me that story, I naively asked him: "But can't you go to the police and file a

complaint against them?"

After he stopped laughing at my question, he answered, "The police work for them."

That's a case from a Latin American country, but in the United States, it's no different. I was sent to the maximum-security prison closest to Los Angeles. The *crème de la crème* of the gangs of Los Angeles end up there. They'd be your cellmates, and you'd hear the stories. They'd talk about the 37th Street gang, the 41st Street gang, Los Locos from wherever. If you crossed into the territory of one of these gangs and weren't from there, you'd get shot.

They've been in that environment ever since they were born. Sometimes I'd talk with them, wondering what circumstances brought a 24-year-old to a maximum-security prison with two life sentences.

They'd say to me, "Look Cuba, the problem is that when you go to elementary school here, you have two

options — either you're in a gang or you're abused by the gangs. It's better to be a gang member than to be abused by a gang. And after you enter that world, one day someone puts a gun in your hand and tells you to go kill that person over there. You have to do it because if you don't, they'll kill you."

## Gains of revolution in daily life

When people talk about the achievements of the Revolution, Cuba's health care and education are internationally recognized. But hardly anything is ever mentioned about the tranquility of our everyday life, the safety we enjoy here, the fact that a child can play until dawn on a street corner near his home and nothing will happen to him. That any tourist can go into the worst possible neighborhood and the worst that will happen, the very worst thing, is that they'll have their gold chain snatched or a knife pulled on them while they're robbed. That's the absolute worst. But in any one of these other countries, a stray bullet could kill anyone in broad daylight. There've been so many cases like that!

In prison, we lived in a microcosm of this world. You went into the dining room and the African-Americans were sitting on one side, certain Hispanics on another, but watch out. Don't sit down by mistake at the table that's not for you. If you do, you're looking for trouble. It was that way out in the exercise yard as well. It's a reflection of the society itself: the blacks in one neighborhood, the whites in another.

In spite of all of our problems, we have the enormous privilege of living in a society that doesn't yet suffer from these evils and, I hope, never will. We have to do whatever it takes to prevent that from happening here. But we also have to educate young people, so that they understand this privilege we enjoy. They were born with it. The majority don't know the other reality. They take what they have for granted. They believe it's like this everywhere. They don't value it. That's why we have to constantly raise the level of consciousness.

In that sense, prison was also a tre-

mendous school for us. As I said, we lived in a microcosm of the world outside. We got to know the problems of many places around the world, problems that, unfortunately, are common to many countries.

## Battle of ideas

We're victims of the big-business press. We're victims of the empire's great publicity machine, which it uses to highlight whatever it finds convenient: nonsense, banalities. It's a constant, 24-hour bombardment, and, unfortunately, there are people who believe that this is all there is. That capitalism is a house with two cars and a swimming pool. And Haiti isn't capitalism. Central America isn't capitalism. The poor neighborhoods of the United States aren't capitalism. Capitalism is whatever it suits them to show!

The ideological battle is the great battle that we must take up with young people. We have to engage in that battle. If we've done this in other areas, how are we not going to carry it out on the ideological plane, something so extremely important, especially now. Because on the positive side, we're probably going to see a huge influx of tourists. On the negative side, there will also be a lot of people spouting propaganda about how great things are in the U.S., or at least what they want people to believe about what it's like there.

For our people, this commemorative date marks the victorious struggle that culminated with our tremendous triumph in 1959. We're living through the experience of meeting fellow citizens wherever we go, as we walk through the streets, as we visit our schools, and having them tell us, "Thank you for what you did for Cuba." But we are also conscious of the fact that we have to be grateful, too.

I think that behind this victory stand many anonymous heroes who have no set working hours: who worked so hard in the mornings, afternoons, nights, middle of the night, or even many sleepless nights, so that the Five could be here to celebrate July 26 along with our people and experience these moments of happiness.

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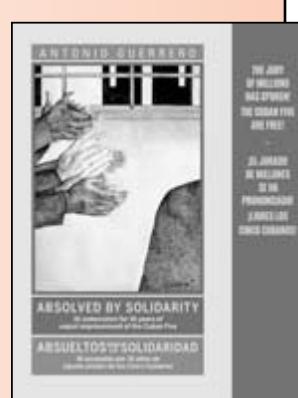
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# Independence for Puerto Rico!

Now is the time to step up the fight for Puerto Rican independence and to free independence fighter Oscar López Rivera, imprisoned by Washington for the last 34 years.

“U.S. bondholders bought up Puerto Rico’s bonds, seeking to make a killing,” Osborne Hart, Socialist Workers Party candidate for mayor of Philadelphia, told parishioners at a church in the Puerto Rican community there last month. “Now, when the colonial government says the spiraling debt is unpayable, they try to make workers on the island bear the burden. We oppose this assault on the working class and support the fight for independence for Puerto Rico.”

“Independence is not simply a nice ideal. It is a necessity,” long-time independence fighter Rafael Cancel Miranda explains. The current crisis and assault on Puerto Rican toilers is awakening more people to see that.

Puerto Rico is a U.S. colony. It is a nation that can’t make its own laws, decide its own foreign relations or control its own economic affairs. Under U.S. rule most small farmers have lost their land to U.S. monopolies, food self-sufficiency was destroyed, unemployment skyrocketed and many Puerto Ricans, unable to subsist on the island, have left for the U.S., an

increasing trend in the last decade.

“Winning the fight for Puerto Rico’s independence is in the interests of the vast majority of people in the United States,” said Martín Koppel, speaking for the SWP, which has championed that struggle since the party’s founding eight decades ago, at the United Nations hearings on Puerto Rico last year. “We have common interests and a common enemy — the U.S. government and the propertied ruling class it defends.”

Cuban toilers removed the imperialist boot from their necks in 1959 and set an example for working people around the world when they overthrew the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship, transforming themselves through the struggle as they began to build a socialist society run by workers and farmers and based on relations of human solidarity and internationalism.

Workers in the U.S. should see the struggle for independence for Puerto Rico as our fight. A labor party based on the unions that joins labor and social resistance would back the fight for independence for Puerto Rico and freedom for Oscar López as we build a movement that emulates the Cuban Revolution and fights to end the dictatorship of capital — in the U.S., in Puerto Rico and around the world.

# Puerto Rico debt

Continued from front page

cies and state-owned utilities that issued the bonds to declare bankruptcy — supervised by a federal court.

The *Journal* called García’s July admission that the debt is unpayable an “open secret.” The paper said in a July 2 editorial that the 2013 Chapter 9 bankruptcy of Detroit should be a model because it allowed the courts to “rewrite labor contracts, trim pensions, restructure public agencies.” In other words, it’s a model for making the working class bear the brunt of “restructuring.”

The paper also backed key proposals in the Krueger report, which was commissioned by the Puerto Rican government and released in late June. These include not applying the federal minimum wage, currently at \$7.25 an hour, on the island and exempting Puerto Rico from the 1920 Jones Act, which requires all maritime trade to be carried on U.S.-flagged ships, doubling shipping costs.

Over the last five years the colonial government has cut pensions, laid off thousands of government workers, raised sales taxes and slashed social programs.

Since 2005 Puerto Rico’s gross national product has shrunk by some 10 percent. Labor participation is only 40 percent of the adult population, compared to 63 percent in the United States. Mississippi, the poorest U.S. state, has a per capita income nearly double that of Puerto Rico.

Some 300,000 residents of Puerto Rico, especially youth, have fled the island over the last decade, with most heading to the U.S. More than 3,000 doctors left over the last five years, with a devastating impact on health care. More than 60 percent of the island’s residents receive Medicare or Medicaid, while reimbursement rates for doctors are 40 percent lower than in the U.S., the *New York Times* said, and more cuts are on the way.

In San Juan, the paper notes, “beds in hospital emergency rooms line the hallways. There are so few nurses that people often hire their own private nurses during hospital stays.”

A July report paid for by 34 hedge funds titled “For Puerto Rico, There is a Better Way” called for more drastic cuts in government spending to ensure full payment of the debt. Co-author Jose Fajgenbaum, a former International Monetary Fund economist, told the *Guardian* newspaper that the Puerto Rican government had been “massively overspending on education” while attendance had been falling. The Puerto Rican government has already closed nearly 100 schools this year and 60 in 2014.

## U.S. colonial rule

Puerto Rico has been a U.S. colony ever since U.S. troops landed in 1898, wresting control of the island from Spain.

Bourgeois economists and capitalist politicians often claim that Washington “sustains” Puerto Rico, because of the high percentage of people there who depend on food stamps and other welfare programs to survive.

“But we’re the ones who sustain the financial vultures and multinational corporations,” Cancel Miranda told the *Militant*. U.S. pharmaceutical companies, hotels and agribusiness have made hundreds of billions of dollars of profits from Puerto Rico. Annual interest on bonds is currently at 12 percent.

In the early decades of the U.S. occupation, thousands of small farmers were pushed off the land, and a once-diversified harvest was replaced by sugar. Today Puerto Rico — with three or four growing seasons per year compared to just one or two in most of the U.S. — imports nearly 90 percent of its food, lining the pockets of U.S. agribusiness.

Some defenders of Puerto Rico’s colonial condition used to say “the Island of Enchantment had the best of both worlds,” Cancel Miranda said. “But even they are now opening their eyes.”

## ‘Militant’ vacation schedule

This is a two-week issue. *Militant* no. 31 will be mailed out August 27.

## ‘Socialist Workers Party only working-class voice’

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SWP presidential campaign.”

Fifteen months before the 2016 elections, the campaign of the capitalist parties is heating up, with 17 Republicans vying for the nomination, front-running Democrat Hillary Clinton’s campaign sputtering and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, who calls himself a democratic socialist, running second in the polls for the Democratic nomination and drawing big crowds.

While knocking on doors in working-class neighborhoods with petitions to get on the ballot and at labor rallies and social actions, “SWP campaigners talk about the need for a labor party based on the unions,” Staggs said. “We need to break from the Democrats, the Republicans and the ‘independents’ who propose Band-Aids to patch up the capitalist system.”

Staggs and Hart are workers at Walmart who are involved in the fight for \$15 an hour, a union and full-time hours at the retail giant.

### Crowds for Sanders growing

Sanders has been attracting crowds — some 28,000 in Portland, Oregon, Aug. 9, and a similar number the next day in Los Angeles. His favorability rating doubled from 12 percent in March to 24 percent in late July, while Clinton’s dropped from 48 to 43 percent.

“As the crisis of the capitalist system grinds on, and attacks on workers deepen, many are looking for something different in 2016,” Staggs said.

“The interest in the Sanders campaign opens up a discussion,” he said. “People ask, ‘Are you a socialist like Bernie Sanders?’ We explain that Sanders proposes radical reforms to save capitalism.”

“Sanders, in his ‘Reforming Wall Street’ plank, proposes breaking up the six biggest banks and taxing financial transactions. We think workers must end the dictatorship of capital and reorganize society based on relations of human solidarity. And we don’t have an American nationalist framework,” said Staggs. “We start with the world and what strengthens the working class worldwide on the road to taking power.”

“We point to the example of Fidel Castro and the July 26 Movement that led workers and farmers to power in Cuba,” he said. “Like Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who led workers and farmers to power in Russia.”

Sanders took some criticism from supporters of immigrant rights after his comments during a July 28 Vox interview when journalist Ezra Klein implied he supports “open borders.”

“Open borders?” Sanders exclaimed. “No, that’s a Koch brothers proposal,” referring to Charles and

David Koch, billionaire manufacturers who contribute heavily to Republican campaigns and who favor less restrictive immigration laws.

“You’re doing away with the concept of a nation state,” he continued. “What right-wing people in this country would love is an open-border policy. Bring in all kinds of people, work for \$2 or \$3 an hour, that would be great for them.”

However, at the Los Angeles rally, Sanders had an immigrant rights supporter speak and said, “Eleven million people cannot continue to live in fear.”

Immigration policy has been prominent in the primary debate. In June Donald Trump slandered Mexican immigrants, saying, “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.”

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, another Republican contender, defended Trump June 30, saying, “The American people are fed up” with illegal immigration.

Republican candidate Jeb Bush called Trump’s comments “vulgar” during a July 27 interview in Spanish on Telemundo. Bush promotes an “immigration reform” that includes a path to legal status, but not citizenship, for some immigrants.

Clinton — following the San Francisco arrest of an undocumented worker in a July 1 killing — denounced the city’s “sanctuary city” policy of not turning people who lack immigration papers over to immigration authorities.

“The SWP says no to deportations, no to E-Verify,” Staggs said. “The labor movement must reject the rulers’ divide-and-conquer tactics and stand with immigrants who insist, ‘We’re workers, not criminals.’”

### Defending right to choose abortion

Trump gets a hearing because of his shoot-from-the-hip, iconoclastic style, which has received more attention than his reactionary political views. But his sexist comments about women have been met with outrage by many.

During a Fox News debate reporter Megyn Kelly told Trump, “You’ve called women you don’t like ‘fat pigs, dogs, slobs, and disgusting animals.’” After the debate, speaking to a CNN reporter, Trump said of Kelly, “You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever.” This remark drew widespread denunciation.

All the Republican candidates except former New York Gov. George Pataki oppose a woman’s right to abortion.

“The Socialist Workers Party explains a woman has the right to control her body and needs to be able to choose abortion if she wishes,” Staggs said. “It’s a basic question of equal rights and critical to strengthening the unity of the working class.”